

# Why Terrorism Does Not Work

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**T**errorist groups attack civilians to coerce their governments into making policy concessions, but does this strategy work?<sup>1</sup> If target countries systematically resist rewarding terrorism, the international community is armed with a powerful message to deter groups from terrorizing civilians. The prevailing view within the field of political science, however, is that terrorism is an effective coercive strategy. The implications of this perspective are grim; as target countries are routinely coerced into making important strategic and ideological concessions to terrorists, their victories will reinforce the strategic logic for groups to attack civilians, spawning even more terrorist attacks.<sup>2</sup>

This pessimistic outlook is unwarranted; there has been scant empirical research on whether terrorism is a winning coercive strategy, that is, whether groups tend to exact policy concessions from governments by attacking their

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1. For decades, terrorism specialists and political scientists have recognized that groups use terrorism to achieve policy objectives. See, for example, Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (July 1981), p. 379.

2. The logic of this argument is explored in Ehud Sprinzak, "Rational Fanatics," *Foreign Policy*, No. 120 (September–October 2000), p. 68; Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (August 2003), pp. 13–14; and Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), pp. 61, 75–76. See also Alan Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002). In recent years, numerous writers have argued that terrorism is both rational and effective. See, for example, David A. Lake, "Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century," *Dialogue-IO*, Vol. 1 (January 2002), p. 15; Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, "Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence," *International Organization*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (April 2002), p. 263; Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Summer 2006), p. 49; Arie W. Kruglanski and Shira Fishman, "The Psychology of Terrorism: 'Syndrome' versus 'Tool' Perspectives," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 2006), p. 207; Noam Chomsky, "The New War against Terror" (transcribed from audio), recorded at the Technology and Culture Forum at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, October 18, 2001, <http://www.chomsky.info/talks/20011018.htm>; and Scott Atran, "Trends in Suicide Terrorism: Sense and Nonsense," paper presented to the World Federation of Scientists' Permanent Monitoring Panel on terrorism, Erice, Sicily, August 2004, <http://www.sitemaker.umich.edu/satran/files/atran-trends.pdf>.

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civilian populations. In the 1980s, Martha Crenshaw observed that “the outcomes of campaigns of terrorism have been largely ignored,” as “most analyses have emphasized the causes and forms rather than the consequences of terrorism.”<sup>3</sup> Ted Robert Gurr added that terrorism’s policy effectiveness is “a subject on which little national-level research has been done, systematically or otherwise.”<sup>4</sup> This lacuna within terrorism studies is both a symptom and a cause of the lack of data sets with coded information on the outcomes of terrorist campaigns.<sup>5</sup> Within the past several years, numerous scholars have purported to show that terrorism is an effective coercive strategy, but their research invariably rests on game-theoretic models, single case studies, or a handful of well-known terrorist victories.<sup>6</sup> To date, political scientists have neither analyzed the outcomes of a large number of terrorist campaigns nor attempted to specify the antecedent conditions for terrorism to work. In light of its policy relevance, terrorism’s record in coercing policy change requires further empirical analysis.

This study analyzes the political plights of twenty-eight terrorist groups—the complete list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) as designated by the U.S. Department of State since 2001.<sup>7</sup> The data yield two unexpected findings. First, the groups accomplished their forty-two policy objectives only 7 percent of the time. Second, although the groups achieved certain types of policy objectives more than others, the key variable for terrorist success was a tactical one: target selection. Groups whose attacks on civilian targets outnumbered attacks on military targets systematically failed to achieve their policy objectives, regardless of their nature. These findings suggest that (1) terrorist groups rarely achieve their policy objectives, and (2) the poor success rate is inherent

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3. Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism, Legitimacy, and Power: The Consequences of Political Violence* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), p. 5.

4. Ted Robert Gurr, “Empirical Research on Political Terrorism,” in Robert O. Slater and Michael Stohl, eds., *Current Perspectives on International Terrorism* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1988), p. 125.

5. See *ibid.*, p. 120.

6. See, for example, Max Abrahms, “Are Terrorists Really Rational? The Palestinian Example,” *Orbis*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Summer 2004), pp. 533–549; Max Abrahms, “Al-Qaida’s Scorecard: A Progress Report on al-Qaida’s Objectives,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*; Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics,” p. 68; Lake, “Rational Extremism,” p. 15; Kydd and Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” p. 49; Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 40; and Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” p. 13. The sample Pape used to determine the motivations of suicide terrorist groups is impressive, incorporating data from every suicide attack from 1980 to 2003. His secondary argument on terrorism’s effectiveness relies on a less convincing sample of cases. For a critique of the methods Pape used to analyze the effectiveness of suicide terrorist groups, see Max Abrahms, “Dying to Win,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Winter 2005), pp. 176–178.

7. U.S. Department of State, “Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs),” October 11, 2005, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/37191.htm>.

to the tactic of terrorism itself. Together, the data challenge the dominant scholarly opinion that terrorism is strategically rational behavior.<sup>8</sup> The bulk of the article develops a theory to explain why terrorist groups are unable to achieve their policy objectives by targeting civilians.

This article has five main sections. The first section summarizes the conventional wisdom that terrorism is an effective coercive strategy and highlights the deficit of empirical research sustaining this position. The second section explicates the methods used to assess the outcomes of the forty-two terrorist objectives included in this study and finds that terrorist success rates are actually extremely low. The third section examines the antecedent conditions for terrorism to work. It demonstrates that although terrorist groups are more likely to succeed in coercing target countries into making territorial concessions than ideological concessions, groups that primarily attack civilian targets do not achieve their policy objectives, regardless of their nature. The fourth section develops a theory derived from the social psychology literature for why terrorist groups that target civilians are unable to compel policy change. Its external validity is then tested against three case studies: the September 1999 Russian apartment bombings, the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, and Palestinian terrorism in the first intifada. The article concludes with four policy implications for the war on terrorism and suggestions for future research.

### *The Notion That Terrorism Works*

Writers are increasingly contending that terrorism is an effective coercive strategy. In his 2002 best-seller, *Why Terrorism Works*, Alan Dershowitz argues that Palestinian gains since the early 1970s reveal that terrorism “works” and is thus “an entirely rational choice to achieve a political objective.”<sup>9</sup> David Lake

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8. Herbert Simon noted that there are two types of rationality. “Substantive rationality” is based on the actual “achievement of given goals.” By contrast, “procedural rationality” depends only on “the [thought] process that generated it.” In other words, substantive rationality is concerned with the consequences of the decision, whereas procedural rationality makes no claim that the actor correctly anticipates the consequences of his decision. Simon, “From Substantive to Procedural Rationality,” in Spiro Latsis, ed., *Method and Appraisal in Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 130–131; and Simon, *Models of Bounded Rationality*, Vol. 3: *Empirically Grounded Economic Research* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 8–9. My article addresses the question of whether terrorism is substantively rational behavior, not whether it is procedurally rational.

9. Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*, p. 86. In the past several years, a flurry of editorials has likewise warned that the tendency for states to reward terrorism is encouraging other groups to use it. See John Derbyshire, “Terrorism Works,” *National Review Online*, October 12, 2000; Evelyn Gordon, “Terrorism Works,” *Jerusalem Post*, July 14, 2005; and R.W. Johnson, “Why Bush Might Yet Give In

recently adapted James Fearon's rationalist bargaining model to argue that terrorism is a "rational and strategic" tactic because it enables terrorists to achieve a superior bargain by increasing their capabilities relative to those of target countries.<sup>10</sup> Based on their game-theoretic model and case study on Hamas, Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter likewise conclude that terrorist groups are "surprisingly successful in their aims."<sup>11</sup> According to Scott Atran, terrorist groups "generally" achieve their policy objectives. As evidence, he notes that the Lebanese-based Shiite terrorist group, Hezbollah, successfully compelled the United States and France to withdraw their remaining forces from Lebanon in 1984 and that in 1990 the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka wrested control of Tamil areas from the Sinhalese-dominated government.<sup>12</sup> For Ehud Sprinzak, the plights of Hezbollah and the Tamil Tigers testify to terrorism's "gruesome effectiveness," which explains its growing popularity since the mid-1980s.<sup>13</sup>

Robert Pape has developed this thesis in a prominent article that was recently expanded into a major book.<sup>14</sup> Pape contends that "over the past two decades, suicide terrorism has been rising largely because terrorists have learned that it pays."<sup>15</sup> He reports that from 1980 to 2003, six of the eleven terrorist campaigns in his sample were associated with "significant policy changes by the target state" and that "a 50 percent success rate is remarkable."<sup>16</sup> The perception that terrorism is an effective method of coercion, he affirms, is thus grounded in "reasonable assessments of the relationship between terrorists' coercive efforts and the political gains that the terrorists have achieved."<sup>17</sup> Pape's research, although confined to suicide terrorist groups, is frequently cited as evidence that terrorism in general is "effective in achieving a terrorist group's political aims."<sup>18</sup>

This emerging consensus lacks a firm empirical basis. The notion that terrorism is an effective coercive instrument is sustained by either single case studies or a few well-known terrorist victories, namely, by Hezbollah, the Tamil Tigers, and Palestinian terrorist groups. Pape's research appears to offer the

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to the Terrorists," *Daily Telegraph* (London), September 29, 2001. See also Kruglanski and Fishman, "The Psychology of Terrorism," p. 207; and Chomsky, "The New War against Terror."

10. Lake, "Rational Extremism," pp. 20, 15.

11. Kydd and Walter, "Sabotaging the Peace," p. 264.

12. Atran, "Trends in Suicide Terrorism."

13. Sprinzak, "Rational Fanatics," p. 68.

14. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism"; and Pape, *Dying to Win*.

15. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," p. 343.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 9; and Pape, *Dying to Win*, pp. 64–65.

17. Pape, *Dying to Win*, pp. 61, 64–65.

18. See, for example, Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," p. 49.

strongest evidence that terrorist groups regularly accomplish their policy objectives, but on closer analysis his thesis is also empirically weak. Not only is his sample of terrorist campaigns modest, but they targeted only a handful of countries: ten of the eleven campaigns analyzed were directed against the same three countries (Israel, Sri Lanka, and Turkey), with six of the campaigns directed against the same country (Israel).<sup>19</sup> More important, Pape does not examine whether the terrorist campaigns achieved their core policy objectives. In his assessment of Palestinian terrorist campaigns, for example, he counts the limited withdrawals of the Israel Defense Forces from parts of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1994 as two separate terrorist victories, ignoring the 167 percent increase in the number of Israeli settlers during this period—the most visible sign of Israeli occupation.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, he counts as a victory the Israeli decision to release Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin from prison in October 1997, ignoring the hundreds of imprisonments and targeted assassinations of Palestinian terrorists throughout the Oslo “peace process.”<sup>21</sup> Pape’s data therefore reveal only that select terrorist campaigns have occasionally scored tactical victories, not that terrorism is an effective strategy for groups to achieve their policy objectives. The two sections that follow are intended to help bridge the gap between the growing interest in terrorism’s efficacy and the current weakness of empirical research on this topic.

### *Measuring Terrorism’s Effectiveness*

Terrorist campaigns come in two varieties: strategic terrorism aims to coerce a government into changing its policies; redemptive terrorism is intended solely to attain specific human or material resources such as prisoners or money.<sup>22</sup> Because my focus is on terrorism’s ability to compel policy change, terrorism in this study refers only to strategic terrorism campaigns. Terrorism’s effectiveness can be measured along two dimensions: combat effectiveness describes the level of damage inflicted by the coercing power; strategic effectiveness refers to the extent to which the coercing power achieves its policy objectives.<sup>23</sup> This study is confined to analyzing the notion that terrorism is strategically ef-

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19. Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” p. 9.

20. Abrahms, “Dying to Win,” p. 177.

21. See Abrahms, “Dying to Win.”

22. Gary C. Gambill, “The Balance of Terror: War by Other Means in the Contemporary Middle East,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Autumn 1998), p. 61.

23. Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 56–57.

factive, not whether it succeeds on an operational or tactical level.<sup>24</sup> Finally, because this study is concerned with terrorism's effect on the target country, intermediate objectives—namely, the ability of terrorist groups to gain international attention and support—are outside the scope of analysis.<sup>25</sup>

This study analyzes the strategic effectiveness of the twenty-eight terrorist groups designated by the U.S. Department of State as foreign terrorist organizations since 2001. The only selection bias would come from the State Department. Using this list provides a check against selecting cases on the dependent variable, which would artificially inflate the success rate because the most well known policy outcomes involve terrorist victories (e.g., the U.S. withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 1984). Furthermore, because all of the terrorist groups have remained active since 2001, ample time has been allowed for each group to make progress on achieving its policy goals, thereby reducing the possibility of artificially deflating the success rate through too small a time frame. In fact, the terrorist groups have had significantly more time than five years to accomplish their policy objectives: the groups, on average, have been active since 1978; the majority has practiced terrorism since the 1960s and 1970s; and only four were established after 1990.

For terrorist groups, policy outcomes are easier to assess than policy objectives. Instead of arbitrarily defining the objectives of the terrorist groups in this study, I define them as the terrorists do. In general, the stated objectives of terrorist groups are a stable and reliable indicator of their actual intentions. This assumption undergirds the widely accepted view within terrorism studies that groups use terrorism as a communication strategy to convey to target countries the costs of noncompliance.<sup>26</sup> Because these groups seek political change

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24. See James T. Tedeschi, "A Reinterpretation of Research on Aggression," *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 81, No. 9 (September 1974), p. 562.

25. There is little debate that terrorism often facilitates the achievement of intermediate objectives. This position gained acceptance after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, when a spate of terrorist attacks galvanized Palestinian nationalist sentiment and propelled the Palestinian cause onto the international agenda. In September 1969, just three months after the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacked a U.S. jet departing from Athens, the United Nations General Assembly recognized the "inalienable rights of the Palestinian people." Eighteen months after Palestinian terrorists killed eleven Israeli Olympians at the 1972 Munich Games, Yassir Arafat was officially invited to speak before this body. Bruce Hoffman has observed, "It is doubtful whether the terrorists could ever have received this success had they not resorted to international terrorism." Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 75. See also Abrahms, "Are Terrorists Really Rational?" p. 341; and Thomas C. Schelling, "What Purposes Can 'International Terrorism' Serve?" in R.G. Frey and Christopher W. Morris, eds., *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 20.

26. See Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," p. 379; Ronald D. Crelinsten, "Terrorism as Political Communication: The Relationship between the Controller and the Controlled," in Paul Wilkinson and Alasdair M. Stewart, eds., *Contemporary Research on Terrorism* (Aberdeen, Scotland: Aberdeen

and because their stated objectives represent their intentions, terrorism's effectiveness is measured by comparing their stated objectives to policy outcomes. A potential objection to this approach is that terrorists possess extreme policy goals relative to those of their supporters, and thus terrorist campaigns may be judged unsuccessful even when they compel policy changes of significance to their broader community. What distinguish terrorists from "moderates," however, are typically not their policy goals, but the belief that terrorism is the optimal means to achieve them.<sup>27</sup> As Pape has observed, "It is not that terrorists pursue radical goals" relative to those of their supporters. Rather, it is that "terrorists are simply the members of their societies who are the most optimistic about the usefulness of violence for achieving goals that many, and often most, support."<sup>28</sup> There are no broadly based data sets with coded information on the objectives of terrorist campaigns, but those ascribed to the terrorist groups in this study are all found in standard descriptions of them, such as in RAND's MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base and the Federation of American Scientists' Directory of Terrorist Organizations (see Table 1).<sup>29</sup>

To capture the range of policy outcomes, this study employs a four-tiered rating scale. A "total success" denotes the full attainment of a terrorist group's policy objective. Conversely, "no success" describes a scenario in which a terrorist group does not make any perceptible progress on realizing its stated objective. Middling achievements are designated as either a "partial success" or a "limited success" in descending degrees of effectiveness. Several groups are counted more than once to reflect their multiple policy objectives. Hezbollah, for example, is credited with two policy successes: repelling the multinational peacekeepers and Israelis from southern Lebanon in 1984 and again in 2000. By contrast, Revolutionary Nuclei is tagged with two policy failures: its inability either to spark a communist revolution in Greece or to sever U.S.-Greek relations.

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University Press, 1987), pp. 3–31; Bruce Hoffman and Gordon H. McCormick, "Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (July/August 2004), pp. 243–281; Max Abrahms, "Al-Qaeda's Miscommunication War: The Terrorism Paradox," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Autumn 2005), pp. 529–549; and Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," p. 59.

27. U.S. Department of Defense, "The National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism," February 1, 2006, p. 3.

28. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," p. 7.

29. Gurr, "Empirical Research on Political Terrorism," p. 120; RAND, MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base: A Comprehensive Databank of Global Terrorist Incidents and Organizations, "Groups Sub-categories," <http://www.tkb.org/Category.jsp?catID?1>; and Federation of American Scientists, "Liberation Movements, Terrorist Organizations, Substance Cartels, and Other Para-state Entities," <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/>. See also Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," pp. 54–55.

Table 1. Terrorist Groups: Objectives, Targets, and Outcomes

Group	Objective	Type	Main Target	Outcome
Abu Nidal Organization	Destroy Israel	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
Abu Sayyaf Group	Establish Islamic state in Philippines	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
Al-Qaida	Expel the United States from Persian Gulf	Limited	Civilian	Limited success
Al-Qaida	Sever U.S.-Israel relations	Idiosyncratic	Civilian	No success
Al-Qaida	Sever U.S.-apostate relations	Idiosyncratic	Civilian	No success
Al-Qaida	Spare Muslims from "Crusader wars"	Idiosyncratic	Civilian	No success
Armed Islamic Group	Establish Islamic state in Algeria	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
United Forces of Colombia	Eliminate left-wing insurgents	Idiosyncratic	Civilian	No success
Aum Shinrikyo	Establish utopian society in Japan	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
People's Liberation Front	Establish Marxism in Turkey	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
People's Liberation Front	Sever U.S.-Turkish relations	Idiosyncratic	Civilian	No success
Egyptian Islamic Jihad	Establish Islamic state in Egypt	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
National Liberation Army	Establish Marxism in Colombia	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	Establish peasant rule in Colombia	Maximalist	Military	Limited success
Fatherland and Liberty	Establish Basque state	Limited	Civilian	No success
Hamas	Establish state in historic Palestine	Maximalist	Civilian	Limited success
Hamas	Destroy Israel	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
Harakat ul-Mujahidin	Rule Kashmir	Limited	Military	No success
Harakat ul-Mujahidin	Eliminate Indian insurgents	Idiosyncratic	Military	No success
Hezbollah (Lebanese)	Expel peacekeepers	Limited	Military	Total success
Hezbollah (Lebanese)	Expel Israel	Limited	Military	Total success
Hezbollah (Lebanese)	Destroy Israel	Maximalist	Military	No success
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	Establish Islamic state in Uzbekistan	Maximalist	Military	No success
Islamic Group	Establish Islamic state in Egypt	Maximalist	Military	No success
Islamic Jihad	Establish state in historic Palestine	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
Islamic Jihad	Destroy Israel	Maximalist	Civilian	Limited success
Kach	Transfer Palestinians from Israel	Idiosyncratic	Civilian	No success
Mujahideen-e-Khalq	End clerical rule in Iran	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)	Destroy Israel	Maximalist	Military	No success
PFLP	Establish Marxist Palestine	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
PFLP-General Command	Destroy Israel	Maximalist	Military	No success
PFLP-General Command	Establish Marxist Palestine	Maximalist	Military	No success



Table 1. Continued

Group	Objective	Type	Main Target	Outcome
Kurdistan Workers' Party	Establish Kurdish state in Middle East	Limited	Civilian	No success
Kurdistan Workers' Party	Establish communism in Turkey	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
Palestine Liberation Front	Destroy Israel	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
Real Irish Republican Army	Establish Irish unification	Limited	Military	No success
Revolutionary Nuclei	Establish Marxism in Greece	Maximalist	Military	No success
Revolutionary Nuclei	Sever U.S.-Greek relations	Idiosyncratic	Military	No success
Seventeen November	Establish Marxism in Greece	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
Seventeen November	Sever U.S.-Greek relations	Idiosyncratic	Civilian	No success
Shining Path	Establish communism in Peru	Maximalist	Civilian	No success
Tamil Tigers	Establish Tamil state	Limited	Military	Partial success

SOURCES: RAND, MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base, <http://www.tkb.org/Home.jsp>; and Federation of American Scientists, "Liberation Movements, Terrorist Organizations, Substance Cartels, and Other Para-state Entities," <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para>.

To construct a hard test for the argument that terrorism is an ineffective means of coercion, I afforded generous conditions to limit the number of policy failures. First, for analytic purposes both a “total success” and a “partial success” are counted as policy successes, while only completely unsuccessful outcomes (“no successes”) are counted as failures. A “limited success” is counted as neither a success nor a failure, even though the terrorist group invariably faces criticism from its natural constituency that the means employed have been ineffective, or even counterproductive. Thus, a policy objective is deemed a success even if the terrorist group was only partially successful in accomplishing it, whereas an objective receives a failing grade only if the group has not made any noticeable progress toward achieving it. Second, an objective is judged successful even if the group accomplished it before 2001, the year the State Department assembled its official list of foreign terrorist organizations. Third, all policy successes are attributed to terrorism as the causal factor, regardless of whether important intervening variables, such as a peace process, may have contributed to the outcome. Fourth, terrorist groups are not charged with additional penalties for provoking responses from the target country that could be considered counterproductive to their policy goals.<sup>30</sup> Fifth, the objectives of al-Qaida affiliates are limited to their nationalist struggles. Groups such as the Kashmiri *Harakat ul-Mujahidin* and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad are not evaluated on their ability to sever U.S.-Israeli relations, for example, even though many of their supporters claim to support this goal.

Based on their policy platforms, the twenty-eight terrorist groups examined in this study have a combined forty-two policy objectives, a healthy sample of cases for analysis. Several well-known terrorist campaigns have accomplished their objectives. As frequently noted, Hezbollah successfully coerced the multinational peacekeepers and Israelis from southern Lebanon in 1984 and 2000, and the Tamil Tigers won control over the northern and eastern coastal areas of Sri Lanka from 1990 on. In the aggregate, however, the terrorist groups achieved their main policy objectives only three out of forty-two times—a 7 percent success rate.<sup>31</sup> Within the coercion literature, this rate of success is considered extremely low. It is substantially lower, for example, than even the success rate of economic sanctions, which are widely regarded as only mini-

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30. That the Israel Defense Forces reoccupied large sections of the West Bank in April 2002 in response to terrorist activity, for example, is relevant only insofar as it may have prevented Palestinian terrorist organizations from accomplishing their stated objectives.

31. Even when “limited successes” are counted as policy successes, the success rate is only 17 percent.

mally effective.<sup>32</sup> The most authoritative study on economic sanctions has found a success rate of 34 percent—nearly five times greater than the success rate of the terrorist groups examined in my study—while other studies have determined that economic sanctions accomplish their policy objectives at an even higher rate.<sup>33</sup> Compared to even minimally effective methods of coercion, terrorism is thus a decidedly unprofitable coercive instrument.<sup>34</sup>

### *When Terrorism Works: The Paramountcy of Target Selection*

The terrorist groups in this study were far more likely to achieve certain types of policy objectives than others. Yet predicting the outcomes of terrorist campaigns based on their policy goals is problematic. The objectives of terrorist groups are sometimes difficult to code. More important, the terrorist groups did not tend to achieve their policy aims regardless of their nature. The key variable for terrorist success was a tactical one: target selection. Groups whose attacks on civilian targets outnumbered attacks on military targets systematically failed to achieve their policy objectives. Below I examine the effects of objective type and target selection on the outcomes of the forty-two terrorist campaigns included in this study.

#### IMPORTANCE OF OBJECTIVE TYPE

Since the mid-1960s, international mediation theorists have asserted that limited objectives are more conducive to locating a mutually acceptable resolution than disputes over maximalist objectives, which foreclose a bargaining range.<sup>35</sup> In the international mediation literature, limited objectives typically refer to demands over territory (and other natural resources); maximalist ob-

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32. Robert A. Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Fall 1997), p. 99.

33. Robert A. Hart, "Democracy and the Successful Use of Economic Sanctions," *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (June 2000), p. 279.

34. To say that the coercive skills of terrorist groups are poor relative to those of states because these groups are considerably weaker is to concede the point that compelling policy change is a low-probability affair for terrorist groups.

35. Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1961); Theodore J. Lowi, "American Business, Public Policy, Case Studies, and Political Theory," *World Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (July 1964), pp. 677–715; and Marvin Ott, "Mediation as a Method of Conflict Resolution, Two Cases," *International Organization*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Autumn 1972), p. 613. The distinction between limited and maximalist issues is also expressed in terms of tangible versus intangible issues, respectively. See John A. Vasquez, "The Tangibility of Issues and Global Conflict: A Test of Rosenau's Issue Area Typology," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Summer 1983), p. 179; and I. William Zartman, *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Conflicts* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1995).

jectives, on the other hand, refer to demands over beliefs, values, and ideology, which are more difficult to divide and relinquish.<sup>36</sup> Empirical research on interstate bargaining has demonstrated that limited issues are more likely to be resolved than demands over maximalist issues; in one study, Jacob Bercovitch, Theodore Anagnoson, and Donnette Willie showed that in the latter half of the twentieth century only one out of ten Cold War disputes resulted in political compromise, compared to thirteen of thirty-one nonideological disputes in which the coercing party succeeded in winning concessions.<sup>37</sup> More recently, scholars have applied the distinction between limited and maximalist objectives to civil wars. Unlike traditional interstate conflicts, which often end in territorial compromise, civil wars were found to defy political resolution because they are frequently fought over competing ideologies where the costs of retreating are comparatively high.<sup>38</sup>

Disaggregating the terrorist campaigns by objective type offers preliminary evidence that it influences their success rate (see Figure 1). As in other political contexts, a terrorist group is said to have limited objectives when its demands are over territory. Specifically, the group is fighting to either (1) evict a foreign military from occupying another country, or (2) win control over a piece of territory for the purpose of national self-determination. By contrast, a terrorist group has maximalist objectives when its demands are over ideology. In this scenario, the group is attacking a country to either (1) transform its political system (usually to either Marxist or Islamist), or (2) annihilate it because of its values.<sup>39</sup> The data suggest that, for terrorist groups, limited objectives are far more likely to be conciliated than maximalist objectives. Coercion succeeded in three out of eight cases when territory was the goal, but it failed in all twenty-two cases when groups aimed to destroy a target state's society or values. This

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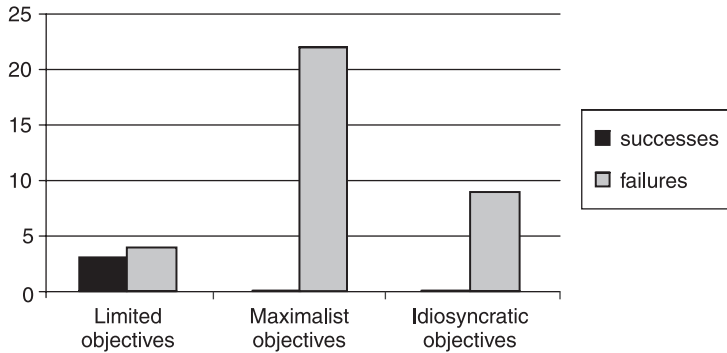
36. Kalevi J. Holsti, "Resolving International Conflicts: A Taxonomy of Behavior and Some Figures on Procedure," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (September 1966), p. 272; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 101; and Daniel Druckman and Benjamin J. Broome, "Value Differences and Conflict Resolution: Facilitation or Delinking?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (September 1988), p. 491.

37. Jacob J. Bercovitch, Theodore J. Anagnoson, and Donnette L. Willie, "Some Conceptual Issues and Empirical Trends in the Study of Successful Mediation in International Relations," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (June 1991), pp. 7–17; Druckman and Broome, "Value Differences and Conflict Resolution," pp. 489–510; and Jacob J. Bercovitch and Jeffrey Langley, "The Nature of the Dispute and the Effectiveness of International Mediation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Autumn 1993), pp. 670–691.

38. Jacob J. Bercovitch and Karl DeRouen, "Managing Ethnic Civil Wars: Assessing the Determinants of Successful Mediation," *Civil Wars*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring 2005), p. 100.

39. There is no suggestion that groups with limited objectives lack ideological convictions, only that the object of change is territorial possession, not the target country's ideology.

Figure 1. Terrorist Objectives Matter



result is not only consistent with previous studies on interstate and civil conflict mediation; it is intuitively understandable that target countries would resist making concessions to groups believed to hold maximalist intentions.

There are, however, major limitations to predicting the outcomes of terrorist campaigns based on the nature of their policy objectives. First, even when their objectives are territorial, terrorist groups do not usually achieve them. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Harakat ul-Mujahidin (HUM), Basque terrorists (ETA), and the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA) have all failed to end what they regard as foreign occupations: the PKK's aspirations of an independent Kurdish state remain elusive; HUM has had little success establishing a Kashmiri state; the ETA has made some progress gaining civil and political rights, but not on its core demand of sovereignty; and Irish unification is not imminent. Second, in some cases terrorist objectives can be difficult to code. As an explanatory variable, objective type lacks robustness; terrorist objectives frequently do not conform to the territory-ideology organizing scheme. In this sample, 20 percent of the policy objectives are termed "idiosyncratic"; campaigns aiming to eliminate other militant groups (e.g., HUM) or sever relations between states (e.g., Revolutionary Nuclei) do not readily fit into the territory-ideology dichotomy (see Table 1). Furthermore, terrorist groups sometimes have ambiguous policy objectives. The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, for example, routinely makes contradictory claims about whether its goal is to destroy Israel or merely establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.<sup>40</sup>

40. The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades is not in the sample because the State Department began listing it as an FTO after 2001.

## THE KEY: TARGET SELECTION

Target selection is a superior explanatory variable for predicting the outcomes of terrorist campaigns. The Department of State defines “foreign terrorist organizations” as groups that engage in “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets.”<sup>41</sup> Like other lists of terrorist groups, the Department of State’s does not distinguish between (1) groups that focus their attacks primarily on civilian targets and (2) those that mostly attack military targets, but occasionally attack civilians. By convention, any group whose strategy includes the intentional targeting of noncombatants is deemed a terrorist organization. This classification scheme may be defensible on normative grounds, but it obscures significant differences in the coercion rates of guerrilla groups and what I call “civilian-centric terrorist groups” (CCTGs). Guerrilla groups, by definition, mostly attack military and diplomatic targets, such as military assets, diplomatic personnel, and police forces.<sup>42</sup> CCTGs, on the other hand, primarily attack innocent bystanders and businesses. Conflating the two types of groups contributes to the view that attacking civilians is an effective tactic for groups to attain their policy goals.<sup>43</sup> In fact, for terrorist groups the targeting of civilians is strongly associated with policy failure.

RAND’s MIPT Terrorism Incident database provides statistics on the target selections of every terrorist group.<sup>44</sup> When groups are classified by target selection, a trend emerges: guerrilla groups—that is, groups whose attacks on “military” and “diplomatic” targets outnumber attacks on “civilian” targets—accounted for all of the successful cases of political coercion. Conversely, CCTGs never accomplished their policy goals, even when they were limited, ambiguous, or idiosyncratic (see Figure 2). The remainder of the article develops a theory to explain why terrorist groups that target civilians systematically fail to achieve their policy objectives, even when they are not maximalist.

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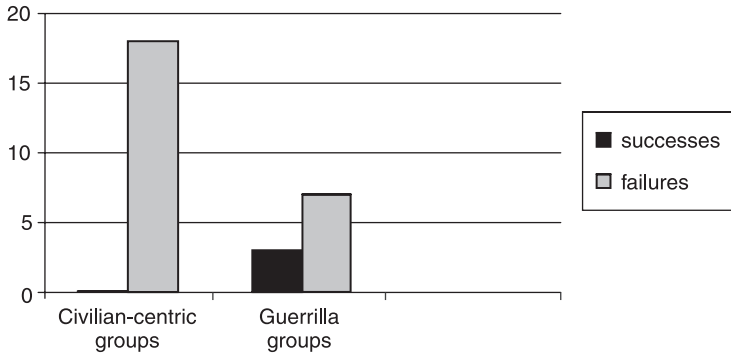
41. U.S. Department of State, “Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs).”

42. The terms “guerrilla warfare” and “insurgency” are often used interchangeably to denote an asymmetric campaign by subnational actors against a conventional army. I have opted against using the term “insurgency” because it also denotes a separatist struggle. The term “guerrilla group,” by contrast, refers only to a subnational group’s target selection. See “Guerrilla,” *Encyclopedia of Terrorism* (London: Sage, 2003), p. 54; and Cathal J. Nolan, *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of International Relations* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2002), p. 669.

43. In Pape’s research, for example, six of the thirteen terrorist campaigns are actually waged by guerrilla groups, which account for all of the terrorist victories in his sample. See Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 40.

44. RAND, MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base, <http://www.tkb.org/Home.jsp>.

Figure 2. Paramourncy of Target Selection



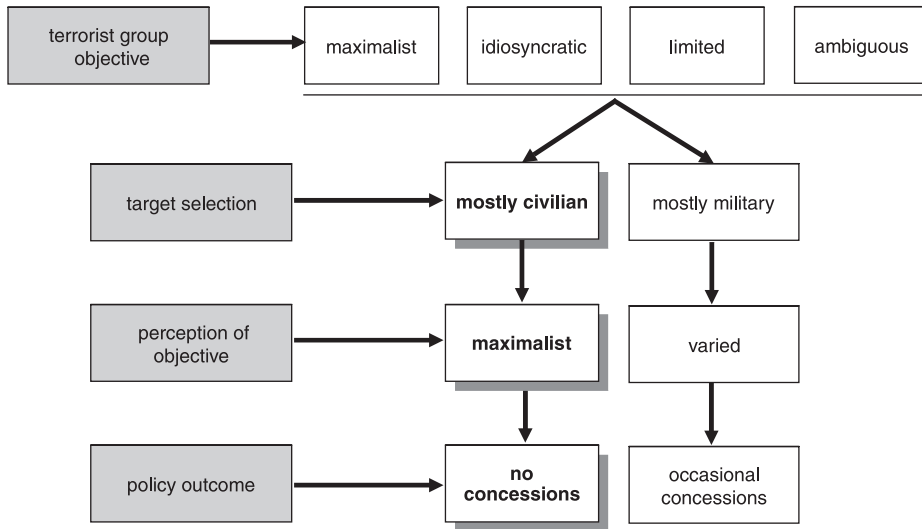
### *Why Attacking Civilians Is Strategically Ineffective*

Terrorism is a coercive instrument intended to communicate to target countries the costs of noncompliance with their policy demands. This notion has important implications for explaining the poor track record of terrorist groups. The following analysis develops a theory for why terrorist groups—especially ones that primarily target civilians—do not achieve their policy objectives. The basic contention is that civilian-centric terrorist groups fail to coerce because they miscommunicate their policy objectives. Even when a terrorist group has limited, ambiguous, or idiosyncratic objectives, target countries infer from attacks on their civilians that the group wants to destroy these countries' values, society, or both. Because countries are reluctant to appease groups that are believed to harbor maximalist objectives, CCTGs are unable to win political concessions (see Figure 3).<sup>45</sup>

This model is grounded in two ways. First, it is consistent with attributional

45. Thomas C. Schelling makes a related point that coercion stands to work only when the coerced party understands the coercing party's demands. See Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 3. Several studies analyze how groups use terrorism to signal their capabilities and resolve. These studies tend to ignore the question of whether terrorism effectively conveys to the target government the terrorist group's policy objectives. See Harvey E. Lapan and Todd Sandler, "Terrorism and Signaling," *European Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 1993), pp. 383–397; Per Baltzer Overgaard, "The Scale of Terrorist Attacks as a Signal of Resources," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (September 1994), pp. 452–478; and Hoffman and McCormick, "Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack," pp. 243–281.

Figure 3. Contingency Model of Civilian-centric Terrorist Groups



research in the social psychology literature; correspondent inference theory offers a framework to show that target countries infer that CCTGs—regardless of their policy demands—have maximalist objectives. Second, correspondent inference theory is applied to three case studies: the responses of Russia to the September 1999 apartment bombings, the United States to the September 11 attacks, and Israel to Palestinian terrorism in the first intifada. The three cases offer empirical evidence that (1) target countries infer that groups have maximalist objectives when they target civilians, and (2) the resultant belief that terrorist groups have maximalist objectives dissuades target countries from making political concessions. The two methodological approaches combine to offer an externally valid theory for why terrorist groups, when their attacks are directed against civilians, do not achieve their policy goals regardless of their nature.

OBJECTIVES ENCODED IN OUTCOMES

Correspondent inference theory provides a framework for understanding why target countries infer that CCTGs have maximalist objectives, even when their policy demands suggest otherwise. Correspondent inference theory was developed in the 1960s and 1970s by the social psychologist Edward Jones to ex-



plain the cognitive process by which an observer infers the motives of an actor. The theory is derived from the foundational work of Fritz Heider, the father of attributional theory. Heider saw individuals as “naïve psychologists” motivated by a practical concern: a need to simplify, comprehend, and predict the motives of others. Heider postulated that individuals process information by applying inferential rules that shape their response to behavior. In laboratory experiments, he found that people attribute the behavior of others to inherent characteristics of their personality—or dispositions—rather than to external or situational factors.<sup>46</sup>

Correspondent inference theory attempted to resolve a crucial question that Heider left unanswered: How does an observer infer the motives of an actor based on its behavior?<sup>47</sup> Jones showed that observers tend to interpret an actor’s objective in terms of the consequence of the action.<sup>48</sup> He offered the following simple example to illustrate the observer’s assumption of similarity between the effect and objective of an actor: a boy notices his mother close the door, and the room becomes less noisy; the correspondent inference is that she wanted quiet.<sup>49</sup> The essential point is what Jones called the “attribute-effect linkage,” whereby the objectives of the actor are presumed to be encoded in the outcome of the behavior.<sup>50</sup> Levels of correspondence describe the extent to which the objectives of the actor are believed to be reflected in the effects of the action.<sup>51</sup> When an action has high correspondence, the observer infers the objectives of the actor directly from the consequences of the action. With low correspondence, the observer either does not perceive the behavior as intentional or attributes it to external factors, rather than to the actor’s disposition.<sup>52</sup>

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46. Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1958), p. 79.

47. Kathleen S. Crittenden, “Sociological Aspects of Attribution,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 9 (1983), p. 426.

48. Edward E. Jones and Daniel McGillis, “Correspondence Inferences and the Attribution Cube: A Comparative Reappraisal,” in John H. Harvey, William J. Ickes, and Robert F. Kidd, ed., *New Directions in Attribution Research*, Vol. 1 (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1976), pp. 389–420; and Edward E. Jones and Richard E. Nisbett, “The Actor and the Observer,” in Jones, David E. Kanouse, Harold H. Kelley, Richard E. Nisbett, Stuart Valins, and Bernard Weiner, eds., *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behavior* (Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press, 1972), p. 87.

49. See “A Conversation with Edward E. Jones and Harold H. Kelley,” in Harvey, Ickes, and Kidd, *New Directions in Attribution Research*, p. 378; and Edward E. Jones and Keith E. Davis, “From Acts to Dispositions: The Attribution Process in Person Perception,” in Leonard Berkowitz, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 2 (New York: Academic Press, 1965), p. 225.

50. Jones and Davis, “From Acts to Dispositions,” p. 227.

51. Crittenden, “Sociological Aspects of Attribution,” p. 427; and Jones and Davis, “From Acts to Dispositions,” p. 263.

52. Jones and Davis, “From Acts to Dispositions,” p. 264. Social psychologists stress two important points: first, that an observer believes an action has high correspondence does not mean the effect of the action actually reflects the actor’s objectives (correspondent inferences can lead ob-

## HIGH CORRESPONDENCE OF TERRORISM

The theory posited here is that terrorist groups that target civilians are unable to coerce policy change because terrorism has extremely high correspondence.<sup>53</sup> Countries believe that their civilian populations are attacked not because the terrorist group is protesting unfavorable external conditions such as territorial occupation or poverty. Rather, target countries infer from the short-term consequences of terrorism—the deaths of innocent citizens, mass fear, loss of confidence in the government to offer protection, economic contraction, and the inevitable erosion of civil liberties—the objectives of the terrorist group.<sup>54</sup> In short, target countries view the negative consequences of terrorist attacks on their societies and political systems as evidence that the terrorists want them destroyed. Target countries are understandably skeptical that making concessions will placate terrorist groups believed to be motivated by these maximalist objectives. As a consequence, CCTGs are unable to coerce target countries into entering a political compromise, even when their stated goals are not maximalist.

The three case studies that follow provide preliminary evidence that terrorism is a flawed method of coercion because (1) terrorism has high correspondence, and (2) inferences derived from its effects militate against political compromise. To highlight the effect of the independent variable—terrorist attacks—on the proclivity of target states to bargain, a supporting case must conform to five empirical criteria: (1) the coercing party is not motivated by a maximalist objective, that is, the desire to destroy the target state's values or society; (2) the coercing party either uses terrorism or is suspected of doing so to further its policy objectives; (3) the target country fixates on the short-term effects of the terrorist acts, rather than the coercing party's policy demands;

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servers to assign mistaken objectives to the actor); and second, perceptions believed to be real have real consequences. Regardless of their accuracy, inferences of the actor's objectives influence the observer's attitude toward the actor. See Jones and McGillis, "Correspondence Inferences and the Attribution Cube," p. 417; and Harold H. Kelley and John L. Michela, "Attribution Theory and Research," *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 31 (New York: Academic Press, 1980), p. 494.

53. Attributional theories have been empirically tested and confirmed in dozens of experiments since Heider introduced the basic framework almost fifty years ago. Relatively few applications have been made outside the laboratory, however, and fewer still have been applied to international relations. Those applied to international relations have tended to describe the cognitive forces impinging on the aggressor, specifically, how situational factors can induce seemingly normal people to participate in depraved foreign policy behavior. See, for example, Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992); Susan T. Fiske, Lasana T. Harris, Amy J.C. Cuddy, "Why Ordinary People Torture Enemy Prisoners," *Science*, Vol. 306, No. 5701 (Summer 2004), pp. 1482–1483; and Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

54. These common consequences of terrorist attacks are carefully explored in Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Polity, 2005).

(4) the target country infers from the effects of the terrorist acts that the coercing party has maximalist objectives; and (5) the target country's inference that the coercing party wants to destroy its society, values, or both impedes it from making political concessions.<sup>55</sup>

### *Russia's Response to the 1999 Apartment Bombings*

Russia's response to the three apartment bombings that killed 229 Russian civilians in September 1999 helps illustrate why terrorist groups that target civilians are strategically ineffective. Before news of the bombings reverberated throughout Russia, there was widespread agreement among Russians that Chechen objectives were limited to establishing an independent Chechen state. During this period, most Russians favored territorial compromise. After the apartment bombings, however, large segments of Russian society fixated on their short-term consequences and inferred from them that the presumed perpetrators (the Chechens) surreptitiously wanted to destroy Russia. This view that the Chechens are irredeemably committed to destroying Russia has eroded support for granting Chechen independence. The attitudinal shift after the bombings offers preliminary evidence that (1) terrorism has high correspondence, and (2) inferences of Chechen objectives resulting from the terrorist attacks militated against making concessions. Below I detail this attitudinal shift by tracing the evolution of Russian opinion on Chechnya between the two Chechen wars.

#### THE FIRST CHECHEN WAR, 1994-96

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, several North Caucasian republics declared sovereignty. In 1991 Chechnya's first president, Dzhokar Dudayev, took the additional step of declaring independence. Federal forces invaded Chechnya in December 1994 to reestablish control in the breakaway republic. For the next twenty months, Russian federal forces battled Chechen guerrillas in an asymmetric war based in Chechnya. During this period of guerrilla warfare, Russians recognized that Chechen objectives were

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55. A potential objection to this framework is that it lacks a time dimension: terrorist groups, even if not initially motivated by maximalist intentions, may adopt them upon achieving more limited objectives. Violent means are often self-sustaining and can distort the ultimate goals of perpetrators, rendering ends and means conceptually indistinct. With this proviso in mind, the framework is not meant to imply that the publics of target countries are necessarily in a state of "false consciousness." Rather, the point is simply that the short-term consequences of terrorist acts inform target countries' understanding of the perpetrators' objectives and that this inference undercuts the terrorists' ability to win political concessions.

limited to self-determination. John Russell has noted that in the first Chechen war, "the Russian public [believed] that Chechens perceived their struggle as one of national liberation."<sup>56</sup> Michael McFaul has similarly observed that "the Russian military and the Russian people believed that the [Chechen] rationale for this war was self-defense."<sup>57</sup> The Russian military shared the view that Chechen objectives were territorial, calling the first Chechen war the War for the Restoration of Territorial Integrity.<sup>58</sup>

During this period, most Russians were prepared to make significant concessions over the status of Chechnya. When the war broke out, the Russian public and even the secret police perceived it as precipitate, believing diplomatic solutions had not been exhausted.<sup>59</sup> Boris Yeltsin's position on the war did not gain popularity as it unfolded. Top military commanders openly resigned and condemned the president for not pursuing negotiations.<sup>60</sup> From the onset of military operations until the cease-fire in August 1996, some 70 percent of Russians opposed the war.<sup>61</sup> Disdain for the war manifested itself most clearly in public attitudes toward Defense Minister Pavel Grachev. Opinion polls rated his approval at only 3 percent, just a few points lower than the Russian public's support for Yeltsin's handling of the Chechen problem in general.<sup>62</sup> By early 1996, domestic opposition to fighting the guerrillas imperiled Yeltsin's electoral prospects. The *Economist* predicted in February that "Mr. Yeltsin can scarcely afford to let the conflict drift violently on if he hopes to win a second term of office in June's presidential election."<sup>63</sup> Yeltsin folded to domestic pressure, calling for an end to all troop operations in Chechnya and the immediate commencement of negotiations with Dudayev over its future status. Yeltsin's approval rating climbed from 21 percent in February 1996 to 52 percent three months later.<sup>64</sup> In May Yeltsin admitted in an interview that he

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56. John Russell, "Mujahedeen, Mafia, Madmen: Russian Perceptions of Chechens during the Wars in Chechnya, 1994–1996 and 1999–2001," *Journal of Post-Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (March 2002), p. 80.

57. Michael McFaul, "Russia under Putin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (July 2000), p. 21.

58. Russell, "Mujahedeen, Mafia, Madmen," p. 77.

59. Mike Bowker, "Russia and Chechnya: The Issue of Secession," *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Winter 2004), pp. 469, 473.

60. Liliia Federovna Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), p. 117.

61. John Russell, "Terrorists, Bandits, Spooks, and Thieves: Russian Demonization of the Chechens before and since 9/11," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (July 2005), p. 105.

62. Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia*, p. 117.

63. "Russia and Chechnya: Yeltsin's Vietnam," *Economist*, February 10, 1996, p. 51.

64. "Mid-month Polls," VCIOM, posted by the Russian Independent Institute of Social and National Problems, <http://www.cs.indiana.edu/~dmiguse/Russian/polls.html>.

would lose the upcoming election if he did not proceed with granting Chechnya de facto sovereignty.<sup>65</sup> The Khasavyurt agreement of August 1996 committed the Russian Federation to relinquishing Chechnya by December 2001.<sup>66</sup> In the interim period, Chechnya would have a de facto state with free elections, a parliament, a president, and autonomy over its finances and resources.<sup>67</sup> Noting the generous terms of the accord, the BBC remarked that the status reserved for Chechnya “essentially signified its independence.”<sup>68</sup> In Khasavyurt, Yeltsin formally acknowledged that Russians preferred territorial compromise to fighting the guerrillas.

#### THE SECOND CHECHEN WAR, SEPTEMBER 1999–PRESENT

On September 8, 1999, Russia experienced its “first taste of modern-day international terrorism.”<sup>69</sup> A large bomb was detonated on the ground floor of an apartment building in southeast Moscow, killing 94 civilians. On September 13, another large bomb blew up an apartment building on the Kashmirskoye highway, killing 118 civilians. On September 16, a truck bomb exploded outside a nine-story apartment complex in the southern Russian city of Volgodonsk, killing 17 civilians. The Kremlin quickly fingered the Chechens as the perpetrators.<sup>70</sup>

Russians responded to the terrorist attacks by fixating on their effects, while ignoring the Chechens’ persistent policy demands. Russia watchers noted during the bombing campaign that “attention is being directed more at the actual perpetration of terrorist acts, their visible, external and horrific effects with

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65. “Hope for Chechnya,” *Economist*, June 1, 1996, p. 16.

66. Mark A. Smith, “The Second Chechen War: The All-Russian Context,” Occasional Paper, No. 40 (London: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, September 2000), p. 5.

67. “Chechnya’s Truce,” *Maclean Hunter*, June 10, 1996.

68. “Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff Elaborates on Putin’s Political Reform Proposals,” *BBC Monitor*, October 4, 2004, <http://www.russiaprofile.org/cdi/article.wbp?article-id=5FEB1101-585F-4CDB-841B-7D467FF7F83B>.

69. Russell, “Mujahedeen, Mafia, Madmen,” p. 77. The September 1999 apartment bombings were not the first terrorist attacks against Russian civilians, but there is general agreement that the bombings represented a watershed. Henceforth, Russian civilians would become a primary target. See Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 127.

70. Since the bombings, a conspiracy theory has continued to circulate that the Federal Security Services framed the Chechens to build support for a counteroffensive. Less than 10 percent of Russians accept this theory as credible. Even though the identity of the perpetrators has never been definitively established, the essential point is that the Russian public believed that the Chechens were responsible for the terrorist attacks. See A. Petrova, “The Bombing of Houses in Russian Towns: One Year Later,” Public Opinion Foundation, poll conducted September 14, 2000, [http://bd.english.form.ru/report/cat/az/A/explosion\\_house/eof003701](http://bd.english.form.ru/report/cat/az/A/explosion_house/eof003701).

perhaps not so much emphasis on the [stated] cause.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, polls showed that following the terrorist acts only 15 percent of Russians believed the Chechens were fighting for independence.<sup>72</sup> The Public Opinion Foundation reported that “this motive is mentioned less frequently now. . . . [It] is gradually dying out.”<sup>73</sup> As Timothy Thomas observed after the bombings, “The Chechens were no longer regarded as a small separatist people struggling to defend their territory.”<sup>74</sup> Yeltsin’s successor, Vladimir Putin, contributed to the view that the Chechens ceased to be motivated by the desire for national self-determination, declaring that “the question of Chechnya’s dependence on, or independence from, Russia is of absolutely no fundamental importance anymore.” Following the terrorist attacks, he stopped referring to Chechens altogether, instead labeling them as “terrorists.” The campaign for the “restoration of territorial integrity” became “the campaign against terrorism.” Russian counterattacks became “counter-terrorist operations.”<sup>75</sup> Putin’s focus on the effects of Chechen violence was most evident after September 11, 2001, when he told Western countries that “we have a common foe,” given that the World Trade Center attacks and the apartment bombings appear to “bear the same signature.”<sup>76</sup>

After the bombings, Russians concluded that Chechen objectives had suddenly become maximalist. Polls conducted after the terrorist attacks showed that Russians were almost twice as likely to believe that Chechen motives were now to “kill Russians,” “bring Russia to its knees,” “destabilize the situation in

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71. Quoted in Charles W. Blandy, “Military Aspects of the Two Russo-Chechen Conflicts in Recent Times,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (December 2003), p. 422.

72. Russell, “Mujahedeen, Mafia, Madmen,” p. 88.

73. Public Opinion Foundation, “Chechen Labyrinth,” June 6, 2002, <http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/az/A/chechenian/ed022239>.

74. Timothy Thomas, “Manipulating the Mass Consciousness: Russian and Chechen ‘Information War’ Tactics in the Second Chechen-Russian Conflict,” in A.C. Aldis, ed., *The Second Chechen War* (Washington, D.C.: Conflict Studies Research Center, 2000), p. 116.

75. Quoted in Roman Khalilov, “The Russian-Chechen Conflict,” *Central Asia Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (January/February 2002), p. 411.

76. Quoted in John O’Loughlin, Gearoid O. Tuathail, and Vladimir Kolossov, “A ‘Risky Western Turn?’ Putin’s 9/11 Script and Ordinary Russians,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (January 2004), p. 9. There is a tendency to dismiss Putin’s comparison of September 11 to the apartment bombings as instrumental rhetoric designed to artificially shore up Russian relations with the West. This assertion, though true, misses an important point: even Russians who opposed stronger relations with the West after September 11, 2001, believed the attacks were analogous to the apartment bombings, despite their belief that the Chechens were the perpetrators. See John O’Loughlin, Gearoid O. Tuathail, and Vladimir Kolossov, “Russian Geopolitical Storylines and Public Opinion in the Wake of 9-11,” n.d., p. 13, <http://www.colorado.edu/IBS/PEC/johnno/pub/Russianstorylines.pdf>.

Russia," "destroy and frighten Russian society," and "bring chaos to Russian society" than to achieve "the independence of Chechnya."<sup>77</sup> Putin's public statements suggest that he too inferred Chechen objectives from the effects of the terrorism, asserting that the presumed perpetrators are attacking Russia so it "goes up in flames."<sup>78</sup> This post-bombing belief that Chechen objectives had become maximalist was accompanied by an abrupt loss of interest in making concessions and unprecedented support for waging war. The Public Opinion Foundation found that a strong majority of Russians (71 percent) supported the idea of trading land for peace but had come to believe that "the Chechens are not trustworthy."<sup>79</sup> When Russians were asked to explain why they no longer trusted the Chechens to abide by a land-for-peace deal, the most common explanation given was "because of the terrorist acts."<sup>80</sup> Whereas Russians had demanded Yeltsin's impeachment over the first Chechen conflict, after the apartment bombings they were "baying for blood."<sup>81</sup> In the first Chechen war, Russians favored, by a two to one margin, an independent Chechen state over battling the guerrillas in the breakaway republic; after the bombings, these numbers were reversed, even when respondents were told that federal forces would "suffer heavy losses."<sup>82</sup> Popular support for war remained remarkably stable after the bombings; six months after they occurred, 73 percent of Russians favored "the advance of federal forces into Chechnya," compared with only 19 percent of Russians who wanted "peaceful negotiations with the Chechen leadership."<sup>83</sup> Since 2000, support for President Putin's Chechnya policy has not dropped below 67 percent.<sup>84</sup>

#### THE APARTMENT BOMBINGS' HIGH CORRESPONDENCE

In the mid-1990s, foreign jihadists began using Chechen territory as a safe haven, but links between the two groups have been exaggerated. Russia scholars

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77. "The Bombing of Houses in Russian Towns," Public Opinion Foundation, poll conducted September 14, 2000, [http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/az/A/explosion\\_house/eof003701](http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/az/A/explosion_house/eof003701).

78. Quoted in Yana Dlugy, "Putin Calls on Religious Leaders to Aid in Anti-terror Fight," Agence France-Presse, September 29, 2004.

79. S. Klimova, "Negotiating with Maskhadov," Public Opinion Foundation, poll conducted November 21, 2002, [http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/societas/chechnya/peace\\_conference/ed024629](http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/societas/chechnya/peace_conference/ed024629).

80. S. Klimova, "Attitude to Chechens: Pity and Fear," Public Opinion Foundation, January 30, 2003, <http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/az/A/Chechenian/ed030429>.

81. Graeme P. Herd, "Information Warfare and the Second Chechen Campaign," in Sally Cummings, ed., *War and Peace in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Conflict Studies Research Center, 2000), p. 32.

82. "Chechnya—Trends, 2000–2005," Levada Center (formerly VCIOM), poll conducted September 30, 2000, [http://www.russiavotes.org/Mood\\_int\\_tre.htm](http://www.russiavotes.org/Mood_int_tre.htm).

83. Smith, "The Second Chechen War," p. 6.

84. O'Loughlin, Tuathail, and Kolossov, "Russian Geopolitical Storylines," p. 22.

widely agree that since the Soviet Union unraveled in the late 1980s, the Chechens' objective has remained constant—to establish an independent Chechen state.<sup>85</sup> Russian perceptions of Chechen aims changed profoundly, however, as a result of the apartment bombings. There is supporting evidence that the barrage of attacks on Russian civilians in September 1999 had high correspondence. Russians fixated on the short-term consequences of the bombings and suddenly concluded that the suspected attackers evidently want Russia destroyed. Once Russians believed that the Chechens' goal was no longer confined to achieving national self-determination, enthusiasm for compromise abruptly declined while support for a military solution increased.

### *U.S. Response to the September 11 Terrorist Attacks*

The response of the United States to the September 11 attacks further illustrates why terrorist groups that target civilians are unable to coerce policy change. The U.S. response provides supporting evidence that (1) terrorism has high correspondence, and (2) inferences derived from the effects of the attacks have not been conducive to offering concessions. The following case study shows that Americans—especially in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks—have tended to ignore al-Qaida's rationale for violence. Instead of focusing on al-Qaida's policy demands, they have fixated on the effects of the terrorist attacks and inferred from them that the terrorists are targeting the United States to destroy its society and values. These inferences have hampered al-Qaida from translating its violence into policy successes in the Muslim world.

#### AL-QAIDA'S STATED OBJECTIVES

Al-Qaida describes its use of terrorism as a communication strategy to demonstrate to the United States the costs of maintaining its unpopular foreign policies in the Muslim world.<sup>86</sup> Osama bin Laden has implored Americans to rid

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85. See Gail W. Lapidus, "Putin's War on Terrorism: Lessons from Chechnya," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (January/March 2002), p. 45; Roman Khalilov, "The Russian-Chechen Conflict," *Central Asia Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (January–February 2002), p. 411; Richard Pipes, "Give the Chechens a Homeland of Their Own," *New York Times*, September 9, 2004; and Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, p. 113.

86. In his May 1997 interview with CNN, bin Laden described terrorism as a "message with no words." Four years later he characterized the coordinated strikes on Washington and New York as "speeches that overshadowed all other speeches." In his treatise for waging jihad, bin Laden's ideological counterpart, Ayman al-Zawahiri, asserted that terrorism is "the only language understood by the West." An al-Qaida spokesman referred to the 2002 attack on a French



themselves of their “spiritless materialistic life,” but a comprehensive perusal of al-Qaida’s public statements reveals scant references to American popular culture. Bin Laden has threatened that “freedom and human rights in America are doomed,” but American political values are also not a recurrent theme in al-Qaida communiqués. The relative silence on these issues suggests that American values are not a principal grievance.<sup>87</sup> In fact, bin Laden has explicitly rejected the claim that al-Qaida’s goal is to change these values. On multiple occasions, he has warned American audiences that those who repeat this “lie” either suffer from “confusion” or are intentionally “misleading you.”<sup>88</sup>

Since bin Laden declared war on the United States in February 1998, his policy demands have remained notably consistent.<sup>89</sup> First, his most well

tanker off the coast of Yemen as a “political message” to Washington. See CNN, “Interview with Osama bin Laden,” May 10, 1997, <http://f11.findlaw.com/news.findlaw.com/cnn/docs/binladen/binladenintvw-cnn.pdf>; videotape from Afghanistan made in November 2001, quoted in Brigitte L. Nacos, “The Terrorist Calculus behind 9/11: A Model for Future Terrorism?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 26, No. 8 (January/February 2003), p. 1; and Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet’s Banner—Meditations on the Jihadist Movement* (London: Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 2001), quoted in “Middle East/Afghanistan: Al Qaida Threat,” *Oxford Analytica*, May 14, 2002, <http://www.ciaonet.org/pbei/oxan/oxa05142002.html>. For an almost identical statement, see “Al-Qaida Urges More Attacks, al-Zawahiri Tape,” *Aljazeera.com*, May 21, 2003.

87. Osama bin Laden’s two-minute audiotape broadcast of October 6, 2002, on Aljazeera, quoted in Rohan Gunaratna, “Defeating Al Qaeda—The Pioneering Vanguard of the Islamic Movements,” in Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer, eds., *Defeating Terrorism: Shaping the New Security Environment* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), p. 26. See also Clark McCauley, “Psychological Issues in Understanding Terrorism and the Response to Terrorism,” in Chris E. Stout, ed., *Psychology of Terrorism: Coping with the Continuing Threat* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), p. 51. Several al-Qaida experts have remarked that al-Qaida leaders almost always emphasize their hatred of U.S. foreign policies, not American values. See, for example, Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden* (New York: Free Press, 2001), p. 223; and Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 45. For a detailed analysis of al-Qaida’s objectives, see Max Abrahms, “Al-Qaeda’s Scorecard: A Progress Report on al-Qaeda’s Objectives,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (July–August, 2006), pp. 509–529.

88. “Bin Laden: ‘Your Security Is in Your Own Hands,’” October 30, 2004, <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/10/29/bin.laden.transcript>.

89. Most terrorism experts believe that bin Laden’s policy demands have stayed consistent since the late 1990s. Even those who place less emphasis on his policy demands do not dispute that the jihadists are committed to realizing them. The debate is over whether granting bin Laden’s demands would alleviate the terrorism threat or merely transfer the violence to a new theater or cause. This article does not take a position on this important question. There is no suggestion here that the global jihadists would lay down their arms upon accomplishing the objectives laid out in bin Laden’s 1998 fatwa. For a sample of works on this debate, see Anonymous (Michael Scheuer), *Imperial Hubris: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2004); Anonymous (Michael Scheuer), *Through Our Enemies’ Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2003); Daniel L. Byman, “Al-Qaeda as an Adversary: Do We Understand Our Enemy?” *World Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (October 2003), pp. 139–163; Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*; Jessica Stern, “Errors in Fighting Al Qaeda Have Worsened the Danger,” *Boston*

known ultimatum is for the United States to withdraw its troops from Saudi Arabia, "Land of the Two Holy Places." His statements indicate that he objects not only to the U.S. stationing of troops in "the holiest of places," but also to U.S. bases serving as a "spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples." In al-Qaida communiqués, criticisms of U.S. military interference in Saudi Arabia have invariably been coupled with complaints about the treatment of its "neighbors," especially Iraq. For the al-Qaida leadership, deploying U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia during the lead-up to the 1991 Persian Gulf War was not only an egregious provocation in itself; the bases represented and facilitated the occupation of "its most powerful neighboring Arab state." Bin Laden and his lieutenants have thus threatened that the United States will remain a target until its military forces withdraw from the entire Persian Gulf.<sup>90</sup>

Second, al-Qaida spokesmen say that its terrorist acts are intended to dissuade the United States from supporting military interventions that kill Muslims around the world. In the 1990s these interventions included "Crusader wars" in Chechnya, Bosnia, and East Timor. Bloodshed in Israel and Iraq during this period generated the most intense opposition. Since the September 11 attacks, al-Qaida's condemnation of the United States has focused on events in these two countries.<sup>91</sup>

Third, al-Qaida communiqués emphasize the goal of ending U.S. support for pro-Western Muslim rulers who suppress the will of their people. Al-Qaida leaders routinely denounce the House of Saud and President Pervez Musharraf's Pakistan in particular as the most "oppressive, corrupt, and

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*Globe*, March 25, 2004; Assaf Moghadam, "The New Martyrs Go Global," *Boston Globe*, November 18, 2005; and Steve Simon and Daniel Benjamin, "The Terror," *Survival*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Winter 2001), pp. 5-17.

90. World Islamic Front, "Jihad against Jews and Crusaders," February 22, 1998, <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>; Osama bin Laden, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," August 1996, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa\\_1996.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html); Middle East Media Research Institute, "Osama bin Laden Speech Offers Peace Treaty with Europe, Says Al-Qa'ida 'Will Persist in Fighting' the U.S.," Special Dispatch, No. 695, posted April 15, 2004, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=\SP69504>. Interview first broadcast on Aljazeera, April 15, 2004; and "Al-Qaeda Urges More Attacks, al-Zawahiri Tape," Agence France-Presse, May 21, 2003.

91. See, for example, "Bin Laden Rails against Crusaders and UN," November 3, 2002, *BBC.com*, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/media\\_reports/1636782.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/1636782.stm). Statement first broadcast on *Aljazeera.com*, November 3, 2002. See also "Bin Laden's Warning: Full Text," October 7, 2001, *BBC.com*, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/1585636.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/1585636.stm). Statement first broadcast on *Aljazeera.com*, July 7, 2001.

tyrannical regimes” whose very existence depends on the “supervision of America.”<sup>92</sup> A prominent al-Qaida website has equated U.S. financial and political support of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to colonization.<sup>93</sup>

Fourth, al-Qaida leaders describe Israel in similar terms, as a colonial outpost. Based on the organization’s communiqués, al-Qaida’s final objective is thus to destroy the “Zionist-Crusader alliance,” which enables Israel to maintain its “occupation of Jerusalem” and “murder Muslims there.”<sup>94</sup>

#### EFFECTS TRUMP RATIONALE

Americans have focused on the effects of al-Qaida violence, not on al-Qaida’s stated purpose. Ronald Steel noted in the *New Republic* after the June 1996 attack on the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 Americans, that American journalists fixated on “who or what bin Laden attacked” and “the method of attack.” By contrast, “what bin Laden had been saying about why he and his al-Qaida forces were attacking was given short shrift.”<sup>95</sup> The British journalist Robert Fisk similarly observed that after the August 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, U.S. leaders emphasized the carnage and devastation, but “not in a single press statement, press conference, or interview did a U.S. leader or diplomat explain why the enemies of America hate America.”<sup>96</sup> Since September 11, 2001, major Western journalists have devoted generous coverage to the fallout of terrorist attacks, but only since 2004, with the publication of Michael Schueur’s *Imperial Hubris*, have they consistently published excerpts of al-Qaida’s communiqués.<sup>97</sup>

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92. *ABC News*, “Interview: Osama Bin Laden,” May 1998, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/interview.html>; and Ayman Zawahiri, quoted in Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, p. 208. See also *Observer*, “Full Text: Bin Laden’s ‘Letter to America,’” November 24, 2002, <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/worldview/story/0,11581,845725,00.html>. The letter first appeared on the internet and was then circulated by supporters in Britain.

93. This statement is based on conclusions reported by the Center for Islamic Studies and Research in The Operation of 11 Rabi al-Awwal: *The East Riyadh Operation and Our War with the United States and Its Agents*, published in 2003. The book was translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. For excerpts, see [http://www.why-war.com/files/2004/01/qaeda\\_east\\_riyadh.html](http://www.why-war.com/files/2004/01/qaeda_east_riyadh.html).

94. Middle East Media Research Institute, “Osama bin Laden Speech Offers Peace Treaty with Europe”; and World Islamic Front, “Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders,” February 23, 1998, <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ladin.htm>.

95. Ronald Steel, “Blowback: Terrorism and the U.S. Role in the Middle East,” *New Republic*, July 28, 1996, pp. 7–11.

96. Robert Fisk, “As My Grocer Said: Thank You Mr. Clinton for the Fine Words . . .,” *Independent* (London), August 22, 1998, p. 3.

97. See Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*, p. 128.

HIGH CORRESPONDENCE OF SEPTEMBER 11

President George W. Bush's public pronouncements indicate that he deduces al-Qaida's motives directly from the short-term consequences of the terrorist attacks of September 11. According to Bush, "We have seen the true nature of these terrorists in the nature of their attacks," rather than in their professed political agenda.<sup>98</sup> For Bush, September 11 demonstrated that the enemy "hates not our policies, but our existence."<sup>99</sup> In the resulting panic weeks after the attacks, he concluded, "These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos." With Americans hesitant to fly after the four planes were hijacked, he asserted, "They [the terrorists] want us to stop flying."<sup>100</sup> The toppling of the World Trade Center and the economic contraction that followed revealed that "the terrorists wanted our economy to stop." With American civil liberties inevitably restricted in the wake of the attacks, he proclaimed that al-Qaida's goals, inter alia, were to curtail "our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other."<sup>101</sup> Given that al-Qaida and its affiliates are mute on these topics, it is difficult to imagine Bush ascribing them to the terrorists had Americans not been greatly frightened for their safety, hesitant to fly, and worried about their political and economic future in the wake of the terrorist attacks.

For President Bush, any group that deliberately attacks American civilians is evidently motivated by the desire to destroy American society and its democratic values. When asked by a reporter in October 2001 if there was any direct connection between the September 11 attacks and the spate of anthrax attacks that followed, he replied: "I have no direct evidence but there are some links . . . both series of actions are motivated to disrupt Americans' way of life."<sup>102</sup> This interpretation of the motives of the unknown terrorist perpetrator(s) is revealing: the identity of the person(s) who sent the anthrax is irrelevant because

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98. George W. Bush, speech by the president to the Warsaw Conference, Warsaw, Poland, November 6, 2001.

99. George W. Bush, remarks by the president to the United Nations General Assembly, New York, November 10, 2001, [http://www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov/01\\_162.htm](http://www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov/01_162.htm).

100. Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004), p. 17; and George W. Bush, presidential speech to the California Business Association, Sacramento, November 17, 2001.

101. Quoted in Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, p. 17; and George W. Bush, address by the president to a joint session of Congress, Washington, D.C., September 23, 2001.

102. George W. Bush, remarks by the president to the Dixie Printing Company, Glen Burnie, Maryland, October 24, 2001, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2001/10/mil-011024-usa03c.htm>.

all terrorists who disrupt the American way of life must be motivated by this maximalist objective.<sup>103</sup>

The American public has tended to share President Bush's interpretation of the terrorists' motives. Polls conducted after September 11 show that most Americans believed that al-Qaida was not responding to unpopular U.S. foreign policies. After the attacks, only one in five respondents agreed with the statement that "there is any way that the United States has been unfair in its dealings with other countries that might have motivated the terrorist attacks."<sup>104</sup> In a separate poll, only 15 percent of Americans agreed that "American foreign policies are partly the reason" for al-Qaida terrorism.<sup>105</sup> Instead of attributing al-Qaida terrorism to U.S. foreign policies, large segments of American society shared Bush's belief that the goal of the terrorists was to destroy American society and values. Since September 11, more Americans have polled that the terrorists are targeting the United States because of its "democracy," "freedom," "values," and "way of life" than because of its interference in the Muslim world.<sup>106</sup>

#### AL-QAIDA'S MISCOMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Bin Laden and his lieutenants frequently complain that the United States has failed to "understand" the "true reason" for the September 11 attacks. Instead of attacking because "we hate freedom," the attacks are a response to the fact that "you spoil our security" and "attack us."<sup>107</sup> Attributional research provides a framework to explain why al-Qaida's communication strategy has failed. As correspondent inference theory predicts, supporting evidence suggests that President Bush and large segments of American society focused on the disastrous effects of al-Qaida's behavior and inferred from them that the terrorists must want to destroy American society and its values—despite al-Qaida's relative silence on these issues.<sup>108</sup>

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103. President Bush is not the only U.S. president to infer these objectives from terrorist attacks. The claim that al-Qaida struck the United States to destroy its society and values was also espoused by President Bill Clinton after the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. See Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, pp. 129–130.

104. Pew Research Center, Roper Center, September 21, 2001. Seventy percent of Americans rejected the idea that "unfair" U.S. foreign policies contributed to the terrorist attacks.

105. IPSOS-REID, Roper Center, September 21, 2001.

106. Roper Center, Harris poll, September 19–24, 2001, <http://www.pollingreport.com/terror9.htm>, October 20, 2005.

107. Quoted in Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*, p. 153; and *Aljazeera.com*, "Bin Laden: 'Your Security Is in Your Own Hands.'"

108. Ronald Spiers, "Try Clearer Thinking About Terrorists," *International Herald Tribune*, January

To be sure, even if terrorism had not delegitimized al-Qaida's policy demands, it is inconceivable the United States would have ever fully complied with them. Paul Wilkinson has observed that in deciding whether to negotiate with terrorists, the target government must first decide whether their demands are "corrigible" or "incorrigible." When demands are perceived as corrigible, the target government engages in a "roots debate"—an assessment of the pros and cons of appeasing the terrorists. When terrorists are perceived as incorrigible, concessions are rejected outright because the demands are deemed so extreme that they fall outside of the realm of consideration. In Wilkinson's model, incorrigible terrorists are not categorically implacable, but placating them would exact a prohibitive cost.<sup>109</sup> In the discourse of international relations theory, realists would support the view that the United States has not entered a post-September 11 roots debate because it is strategically wedded to the Middle East.

Realists are on strong ground in their prediction that the world's most powerful country would not willingly concede a geographically vital region of the world to terrorists. But it is doubtful that had Americans viewed al-Qaida's stated grievances as credible, they would have embraced a counterterrorism strategy after September 11 that systematically aggravated them. In response to the September 11 attacks, the United States took four steps: (1) increased troop levels in the Persian Gulf fifteenfold; (2) strengthened military relations with pro-U.S. Muslim rulers, especially in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; (3) supported counterterrorism operations—either directly or indirectly—that have killed tens of thousands of Muslims around the world; and (4) became an even less partial mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>110</sup> Although the

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14, 2003; Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, p. 223; and Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, p. 45. See also Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*, p. x.

109. Paul Wilkinson, "Security Challenges in the New Reality," lecture, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, October 16, 2002.

110. For a detailed analysis of al-Qaida's effect on U.S. policies in the Muslim world, see Abrahms, "Al-Qaeda's Scorecard." In this study, al-Qaida is tagged with failures in three of the core policy objectives outlined in its 1998 declaration of war: ending U.S. support for Muslim "apostate" regimes, Israel, and what it derides as "Crusader wars," such as Operation Iraqi Freedom. Al-Qaida's policy effectiveness in the Persian Gulf is designated as a "limited success." Overall, the September 11 attacks did not reduce U.S. involvement in the Gulf. On the contrary, the attacks served as the critical impetus for the American public's decision to support the operation, which has led to the long-term occupation of Iraq and unprecedented U.S. military cooperation with the Gulf monarchy countries. The one modest success was the U.S. decision to draw down its troop presence in the Saudi Arabian Peninsula after September 11, 2001. Al-Qaida does not regard this policy outcome as noteworthy, for two reasons. First, the decision to withdraw hundreds of American troops from the Saudi desert after September 11 palls in comparison to the roughly 150,000 additional U.S. troops that were deployed to the same theater during this period. Second, U.S. in-

September 11 attacks achieved al-Qaida's intermediate objectives of gaining supporters and attention, its post-September 11 policy failures are a testament, at least in part, to its flawed communication strategy.

### *Israel's Response to the First Intifada*

The first intifada may seem like an unlikely case study to illustrate the limitations of terrorism as a coercive strategy. The mass uprising in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank was an exceptionally moderate period in the history of Palestinian terrorism. The revolt from December 1987 to January 1991 killed only twenty Israeli civilians. Compared with the "Revolutionary Violence" campaign of the 1970s and the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000, the first intifada was a peaceful interlude.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, the spontaneous insurrection was a bottom-up initiative. It circumvented Palestinian terrorist groups, which were ideologically opposed to a two-state solution. These groups were momentarily sidelined for three reasons. First, the Marxist groups (e.g., the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the PFLP-General Command) were reeling from the recent loss of their Soviet patron with the end of the Cold War. Second, the Islamist groups (e.g., Hamas and Islamic Jihad) did not yet pose a significant challenge to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Third, the PLO was based in Tunis during this period, largely detached from Palestinian life in the territories.<sup>112</sup> Facing relatively little competition from other Palestinian groups, the PLO co-opted the mass uprising in the late 1980s by recognizing the Israeli state within its pre-1967 borders and formally renouncing terrorism. Despite the unusually moderate tactics and objectives of the intifada, the Israeli response to it underscores that (1) the limited use of Palestinian terrorism had high correspondence, and (2) Israeli inferences of Palestinian objectives undermined support for making concessions.

Edy Kaufman has noted that "the primary purpose of the first intifada was

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interference in the political affairs of the Saudi kingdom increased markedly after the September 11 attacks, owing to the joint U.S.-Saudi interest in fighting the jihadists. I thank Michael Knights of *Jane's Intelligence Review* for offering his expertise in this area. For supporting analysis, see Chaim Kaufmann, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Summer 2004), p. 31; and Pape, *Dying to Win*, pp. 46, 84.

111. B'Tselem, "Fatalities in the First Intifada," [http://www.btselem.org/english/statistics/first\\_Intifada\\_Tables.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/statistics/first_Intifada_Tables.asp).

112. See Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, p. 24; and Council on Foreign Relations, "Terrorism: Questions and Answers," October 31, 2005, <http://cfrterrorism.org/groups/pflp.html>.

to communicate to Israelis the need to end the occupation of the territories."<sup>113</sup> Terrorist acts, even in small numbers, interfered with the message. Throughout the intifada, only 15 percent of Palestinian demonstrations were violent.<sup>114</sup> Yet an absolute majority of Israelis (80 percent) believed that the means employed by the Palestinians to protest Israeli rule were "mainly violent." Of the violent Palestinian acts, the vast majority consisted of rock throwing against the Israel Defense Forces in the territories, with few incidences of terrorism inside the Green Line. An even broader consensus of Israelis (93 percent) felt that the intifada was directed "both towards civilians and towards the army."<sup>115</sup> Notwithstanding the intifada's restrained use of violence, Israelis appear to have fixated on the intermittent attacks against Israeli civilians.

The Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research conducted a series of polls in December 1990 to assess the Israeli public's views of Palestinian objectives in the first intifada. As correspondent inference theory predicts, a strong majority of the respondents surveyed (85 percent) believed its purpose was to "cause damage and injury"—as it surely did—while only a fraction (15 percent) believed the goal was to "express protest." Similarly, the majority (66 percent) believed that the intifada was directed against "the existence of the state of Israel," while a minority (34 percent) believed the purpose was to liberate the West Bank and Gaza Strip.<sup>116</sup> The disconnect between the PLO's policy demands and Israeli perceptions of Palestinian objectives has been explained by (1) inconsistent rhetoric on the part of Palestinian leaders about the aims of the intifada, and (2) Jewish apprehension that contemporary violence against Israel is akin to previous traumatic experiences in which Jewish survival in the Diaspora was threatened.

Compelling evidence suggests, however, that terrorism informed the Israeli view of Palestinian objectives. In a fascinating study based on the polling data contained in the Guttman report, Kaufman observed that the respondents who perceived Palestinian tactics as "mainly violent" were more likely to believe that the Palestinian goal was to "destroy Israel." Conversely, the more Israelis perceived Palestinian tactics as nonviolent, the more they believed the goal

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113. Edy Kaufman, "Israeli Perceptions of the Palestinians' 'Limited Violence' in the Intifada," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Winter 1991), p. 4.

114. Gene Sharp, "The Intifada and Nonviolent Struggle," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Autumn 1989), p. 7.

115. Kaufman, "Israeli Perceptions of the Palestinians' 'Limited Violence' in the Intifada," p. 4.

116. Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research, Jerusalem, "Public Assessment of the Activities and Violence of the Intifada," No. (s)IK1124/E&H (December 1990).



was to liberate the territories. The positive correlation between perceived Palestinian terrorism and maximalist objectives existed independent of the respondents' political affiliation, suggesting that the association was not a function of their preexisting political attitudes.<sup>117</sup> Not surprisingly, Israelis were twice as likely to believe "less in the idea of peace" than before the intifada.<sup>118</sup> Because the majority of Israelis regarded the intifada as a protracted terrorist campaign, and Israelis inferred from Palestinian terrorism their intentions of wanting to destroy Israel, the intifada undermined Israeli confidence in the Palestinians as a credible partner for peace.

In the early 1990s, Israeli Prime Ministers Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin came under increased pressure to trade "land for peace" with the Palestinians. The sources of pressure were twofold. First, President George H.W. Bush, determined to improve U.S.-Arab relations after Israel had lost its strategic utility as a Cold War satellite, "forced the Israelis to the negotiating table" by linking U.S. financial assistance to Shamir's participation in the Madrid peace conference in October 1991. Second, Israeli military strategists recognized that the Jewish state faced a long-term demographic problem in occupying a growing and restive Palestinian population.<sup>119</sup> In September 1993 Israel consented to the land-for-peace formula outlined in the Declaration of Principles known as the Oslo accords, but the pattern persisted: although Palestinian terrorism demonstrated to Israel the costs of the occupation, it undercut Israeli confidence in the Palestinians as a credible partner for peace, reducing support for making territorial concessions.<sup>120</sup> Throughout the 1990s, the Jaffee Center

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117. Kaufman, "Israeli Perceptions of the Palestinians 'Limited Violence' in the Intifada," p. 13.

118. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, No. 1 (weekend ed., August 27, 1988), p. 451.

119. Avi Shlaim, "When Bush Comes to Shove: America and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process," *Oxford International Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring 1992), p. 4.

120. The limited objectives of the first intifada should not be confused with the maximalist objectives of the Palestinian terrorist organizations. The six Palestinian terrorist organizations in this study have been largely ineffective in accomplishing their policy objectives. Hamas is typically regarded as the greatest beneficiary of Palestinian terrorism. Even for Hamas, however, the gulf between its policy demands and their outcome is vast. Its Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement stresses two goals. First, Israel "or any part of it should not be squandered; it or any part of it should not be given up." According to Hamas, all of historic Palestine is an Islamic *waqf*, which translates as a "prohibition from surrendering or sharing." Hamas's only territorial acquisition is in the Gaza Strip, which represents less than 2 percent of the total land area Hamas claims as its own. Even if one assumes that Hamas may ultimately accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, its territorial achievements to date have been minor. The Gaza Strip—one-nineteenth the size of the West Bank—represents less than 6 percent of the disputed land outside the Green Line. Even the most moderate Palestinian nationalist would be categorically opposed to establishing a Palestinian state in such a small territory. Furthermore, according to international law Gaza remains under occupation because Israel still controls the airspace and Palestinian movement on land and by sea. Palestinians share the view that Gaza remains under occupation, commonly referring to it as "the prison." The second major policy objective is to destroy Israeli so-

for Strategic Studies periodically polled Israeli respondents on their perceptions of Palestinian aspirations. The “dominant” response was that the Palestinians wanted to “conquer Israel” and “destroy a large portion of the Jewish population,” a position that peaked during heightened levels of terrorist activity.<sup>121</sup> The perception that the Palestinians hold maximalist aspirations has been the principal impediment to Israel’s willingness to make significant territorial concessions. Since 1994 the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research has polled a representative sample of Israelis on two questions: Do you believe the Palestinians are viable partners for peace? And do you support the peace process? Instances of Palestinian terrorism systematically incline Israelis to answer “no” to both questions.<sup>122</sup>

In sum, since the first intifada, Palestinian violence has created pressure on Israel to change the status quo. Paradoxically, terrorism has simultaneously convinced Israelis that the Palestinians are not committed to a two-state solution, which has eroded support for making the territorial concessions necessary to achieving it.

## Conclusion

Thomas Schelling asserted more than a decade ago that terrorists frequently accomplish “intermediate means toward political objectives . . . but with a few exceptions it is hard to see that the attention and publicity have been of much value except as ends in themselves.”<sup>123</sup> This study corroborates that view; the twenty-eight groups of greatest significance to U.S. counterterrorism policy have achieved their forty-two policy objectives less than 10 percent of the time. As the political mediation literature would predict, target countries did not make concessions when terrorist groups had maximalist objectives. Yet even

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ciety. Despite Palestinian violence, Israel’s gross domestic product per capita (\$18,000) is higher than those of New Zealand, Spain, Portugal, and Greece. Far from destroying Israel, Palestinians consistently rate Israel as the country to which the goal of Palestinian statehood should most aspire. See Central Intelligence Agency, “Gaza Strip,” *The World Fact Book*, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>; “Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement,” August 18, 1988, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/mideast/hamas.htm>; and Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “Palestinians Expect It to Grow,” June 6, 2005, <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2005/p16ejoint.html>.

121. Asher Arian, *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security, 2000* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2000), p. 14.

122. Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, Tel Aviv University, “Peace Index,” <http://www.tau.ac.il/peace>. See also David Fielding and Madeline Penny, “What Causes Changes in Opinion about the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process?” Economics Discussion Paper, No. 0601 (Dunedin, New Zealand: School of Business, University of Otago, March 2006), p. 8.

123. Schelling, “What Purposes Can ‘International Terrorism’ Serve?” p. 20.

when groups expressed limited, ambiguous, or idiosyncratic policy objectives, they failed to win concessions by primarily attacking civilian targets. This suggests not only that terrorism is an ineffective instrument of coercion, but that its poor success rate is inherent to the tactic of terrorism itself.

Why are terrorist groups unable to coerce governments when they primarily attack civilian targets? Terrorism miscommunicates groups' objectives because of its extremely high correspondence. The responses of Russia to the September 1999 apartment bombings, the United States to the attacks of September 11, and Israel to Palestinian terrorism in the first intifada provide evidence that target countries infer the objectives of terrorist groups not from their stated goals, but from the short-term consequences of terrorist acts. Target countries view the deaths of their citizens and the resulting turmoil as proof that the perpetrators want to destroy their societies, their publics, or both. Countries are therefore reluctant to make concessions when their civilians are targeted irrespective of the perpetrators' policy demands.

Four policy implications follow for the war on terrorism. First, terrorists will find it extremely difficult to transform or annihilate a country's political system. Second, the jihadists stand to gain from restricting their violence to military targets. Already, mounting U.S. casualties in Iraq and the absence of a post-September 11 attack on the homeland have eroded U.S. support for maintaining a military presence in Iraq.<sup>124</sup> Terrorist strikes on the U.S. homeland will only undermine the terrorists' message that their purpose is to alter unpopular U.S. policies in the Muslim world. Even sporadic attacks on American civilians—if seen as the dominant component of al-Qaida's overall strategy—will undermine support for an exit strategy. Third, the self-defeating policy consequences of terrorism will ultimately dissuade potential jihadists from supporting it. Although guerrilla attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq show no signs of abating, polling data from Muslim countries suggest that the terrorism backlash is already under way. The Pew Research Center reported in its July 2005 Global Attitudes Project that compared with its polls conducted in 2002, "In most majority-Muslim countries surveyed support for suicide bombings and other acts of violence in defense of Islam has declined significantly," as has "confidence in Osama bin Laden to do the right thing in world affairs."<sup>125</sup> Similarly, major Islamist groups and leaders are increasingly denouncing terrorist

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124. See "Bush Urges Patience as Support for War Shrinks," *CNN.com*, October 30, 2005.

125. Since 2002, public support for terrorism has dropped by 64 percent in Pakistan, 80 percent in Indonesia, 87 percent in Lebanon, and 200 percent in Morocco. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Support for Terror Wanes among Muslim Publics," July 14, 2005, pp. 2, 6, <http://www.pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/248.pdf>.

attacks as counterproductive, even as they encourage guerrilla warfare against the Iraqi occupation.<sup>126</sup> Fourth, it is commonly said that terrorists cannot be deterred because they are willing to die for their cause and that they lack a “return address” to threaten with a retaliatory strike.<sup>127</sup> But perhaps the greatest reason deterrence breaks down is because of the widespread, albeit erroneous, belief that attacking civilians is an effective strategy for terrorist groups to advance their policy goals. Disabusing terrorists of this notion would go a long way toward defusing the cycles of violent reprisal.

Further research is needed in three areas. First, why do terrorist groups target civilians if doing so is strategically ineffective? Testing of the following four hypotheses could yield useful results: (1) groups have an exaggerated sense of terrorism’s ability to coerce policy change;<sup>128</sup> (2) terrorist groups attach equal importance to achieving their intermediate objectives; (3) even though terrorism almost never pays, it is a superior strategy to the alternatives, such as conducting a peaceful protest; and (4) only comparatively weak groups target civilians, because attacking military targets requires a higher level of combat sophistication. Of these hypotheses, only the fourth one appears empirically dubious. Nascent terrorist groups generally focus their attacks on military targets and then graduate to attacking civilian targets. This progression from military to civilian targets was evident between the two Chechen wars, between al-Qaida’s declaration of war on the United States in 1998 and the September 11 attacks, and from the beginning of the first intifada to its more violent conclusion. In each campaign, the terrorists initially confined their attacks to military targets and then, upon becoming stronger organizationally and technologically, took aim at civilians.

Second, future research may demonstrate that in international relations the attribute-effect linkage diminishes over time. In this study, the target countries inferred from attacks on their civilians that the perpetrators held maximalist objectives that could not be satisfied. As time elapsed from the terrorist attacks, however, the publics of Russia and the United States began expressing

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126. Fareed Zakaria, “How We Can Prevail,” *Newsweek*, July 18, 2005, p. 38.

127. See, for example, George W. Bush, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America” (Washington, D.C.: White House, September 17, 2002), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>.

128. Bin Laden, for example, has frequently said that terrorism works, especially against the United States, such as when it withdrew from Lebanon following the 1983 U.S. Marine barracks bombing and from Somalia in 1993 after the deaths of the eighteen U.S. Army Rangers. See Bruce Hoffman, “Rethinking Terrorism and Counterterrorism since 9/11,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (September 2002), p. 310.

greater receptivity to curtailing their country's influence in Chechnya and the Muslim world, respectively.<sup>129</sup>

Third, correspondent inference theory may have prescriptive utility for conducting a more strategic and humane war on terrorism. If countries impute terrorists' motives from the consequences of their actions, then the communities in which terrorists thrive may impute states' motives from the consequences of their counterterrorism policies, reinforcing the strategic logic of minimizing collateral damage. Correspondent inference theory can explain not only why terrorist campaigns rarely work, but also perhaps why counterterrorism campaigns tend to breed even more terrorism.

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129. See A. Petrova, "Approval for Russian Military Actions in Chechnya Is Steadily Declining," Public Opinion Foundation Database, September 5, 2002, [http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/societas/Chechnya/truck\\_war/eof023305](http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/societas/Chechnya/truck_war/eof023305); and Susan Page, "Poll: American Attitudes on Iraq Similar to Vietnam Era," *USA Today*, December 15, 2005.